

Drink the Water, Lose the Plastic

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Does my timing to Florida as my permanent residence correspond to the introduction of bottled water into our society or are Floridians just more prone to littering than Kansans? I can't believe the amount of litter I see along the roadways in the Sustainable Big Bend area. I have been outspoken enough about my feelings that I was named to work on a Wakulla County Commissioners' committee to suggest ways of changing the habits of many as it concerns littering. I continue to be surprised at people's willingness to litter and much of it includes plastic water bottles.

It makes me wonder what we did before we had them and why are we so inclined to buy our water instead of relying on tap water? UF/IFAS Food and Nutrition Specialist, Dr. Karla Shelnutt and an UF Intern recently wrote a new publication called "Facts about Bottled Water", FCS 8887 that addresses this issue. You may wish to request a copy from your County Extension Office or go to www.solutionsforyourlife.com to have immediate access.

Today I want to focus on why, as we approach the heat of the Florida summer, we need to hydrate ourselves often and with a beverage that are best suited for our body. Do you realize that about 60% of your body weight is comprised of water? We get about 20% of the needed water from the foods we eat and the remainder must come from beverages. One of the best sources is WATER.

Dr. Shelnutt's research reveals that half of all Americans now consume bottled water regularly. As the popularity of it increased, so have the questions about its safety. Dr. Shelnutt answers safety questions in this UF/IFAS publication. I particularly appreciate the inclusion of some of the popular myths that she addresses. She calls this section of her article, *Don't Drown in the Myths*. For example.....

MYTH: All bottled water comes from a natural spring.

FACT: About 25% of all bottled water is taken from city water sources and then purified multiple times. If the bottled water comes from a city source it must be stated on the label unless it has been further purified; in this case the label will say purified water.

MYTH: Bottled water is cleaner and more pure than tap water.

FACT: As long as both the city water and the bottled water are following regulations, bottled water is no safer than tap water. Tap water is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Agency creates guidelines for what can be in the water and have high standards that must be met. Bottled water is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration, which has guidelines that are not as strict as the EPA guidelines for tap water. Neither is required to be 100% free of contaminants.

I encourage you to get this publication to dispel more myths. For example: It is perfectly safe to reuse your disposable bottles; and freezing bottled water and leaving it in a hot car is dangerous because the plastic can leak dioxins, a cancer-causing agent, into the water.

My summer advice is to encourage you to hydrate frequently. Let me remind you that water is the most important of all nutrients in the body. In addition, act responsibly. When you purchase beverages in disposable containers, recycle them!!! Let's be proud of the roads and waterways in the Sustainable Big Bend.

If you have a question, write to Shelley Swenson, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida Extension--Wakulla County, 84 Cedar Avenue, Crawfordville, FL 32327-2063; or call the Extension Office 926-3931, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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